



**One Hundred Seventeenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

October 19, 2021

The Honorable David Pekoske
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
6595 Springfield Center Dr.
Springfield, VA 22150

Dear Administrator Pekoske:

I write concerning potential disruptions facing the traveling public during the upcoming holiday travel season, and the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) plans to mitigate disruptions, stemming from the Biden Administration's mandate that all Federal employees be fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021.¹

With press reports indicating that 40 percent of the TSA workforce is not yet confirmed to be vaccinated, I am concerned that the heavy-handed vaccine mandate the Biden Administration has insisted upon could result in the discipline, attrition, or even termination of tens of thousands of TSA employees.² Given that the deadline for compliance with the President's Executive Order is the Monday just before Thanksgiving—the busiest air travel period of the year—I am concerned that the potential shortage of dedicated TSA employees may result in a catastrophic impact to the traveling public and the Nation's airports during the busy holiday season. As we saw over the recent holiday weekend, there is immense demand for air travel, and Americans want to visit family and friends during this year's holiday season—travel that remains critical to the Nation's economic recovery.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TSA provided the front-line workforce with personal protective equipment (masks, eye protection, and gloves), implemented new equipment sanitization standards, and instituted acrylic shielding, physical distancing measures, and new technology at checkpoints to reduce contact with passengers. I commend you for using the authorities provided by the *Aviation and Transportation Security Act* to provide paid administrative leave for high-risk employees and employees who had possible COVID-19 exposure.³ Front-line TSA employees have continued to show their dedication throughout the

¹ Executive Order on Requiring Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination for Federal Employees, September 9, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/09/executive-order-on-requiring-coronavirus-disease-2019-vaccination-for-federal-employees/>

² Gregory Wallace and Pete Muntean, "TSA Says 40% of Employees Are Unvaccinated as Deadline Looms", CNN, October 13, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/13/politics/tsa-covid-vaccinated-employees-deadline/index.html>

³ Transportation Security Administration 101 Briefing provided to Committee Staff, February 12, 2021.

global pandemic. They performed their public-facing jobs every day, as passenger volume decreased in 2020 and as it began its rebound in summer 2021. Over 10,000 TSA employees have tested positive for COVID-19 and, tragically, 30 employees have passed away.

Now, these dedicated and hard-working employees are at risk of losing their jobs due to President Biden's vaccine mandate. Even if the Administration opts to not immediately terminate employees who are not fully vaccinated, the adverse impact on employee morale for those facing disciplinary actions could lead many to leave the agency on their own at a crucial time for travel. While I agree that having a fully vaccinated TSA workforce should be the objective, I believe that, like all Americans, Federal employees should have the right to choose if and when they will receive the vaccine based on personal health considerations and their own timeline, not the Federal Government's.

With only five weeks to go before this arbitrary deadline from the Biden Administration, I am very concerned that a lack of TSA employees securing our Nation's airports and surface transportation sites will negatively impact the holiday travel season. As the transportation sector is trying to recover from the pandemic's devastating toll on the industry, it is incumbent upon TSA to facilitate passenger travel in an efficient and secure manner. To that end, I request answers to the following questions by October 26, 2021:

1. How many TSA employees have been fully vaccinated versus those who are partially vaccinated or wholly unvaccinated?
2. What steps has TSA taken to encourage its workforce to receive the COVID-19 vaccine? What feedback has the agency received from employees in response to such efforts?
3. What mechanism is TSA using for the workforce to report and document their vaccination status?
4. What options, if any, do TSA employees have to undergo regular COVID-19 testing if they choose not to be vaccinated?
5. What is TSA's plan for handling increased traffic volume at airport checkpoints if a large number of its Transportation Security Officers are not able to perform their screening duties or are terminated due to the Administration's Executive Order?
6. What measures has TSA taken to ensure widespread and equitable access to vaccinations for employees who wish to be vaccinated?
7. How is TSA engaging with transportation stakeholders ahead of the holiday travel season, and what concerns have stakeholders expressed about checkpoint management and wait times?

8. What details can TSA provide on agency-specific guidance for the frontline workforce on Executive Order 14043?
 - a. When was guidance disseminated to the workforce?
 - b. Is the agency planning disciplinary action for personnel who do not provide proof of vaccination?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Kathryn Maxwell on Committee staff at 202-226-8417.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gimenez', with a stylized, flowing script.

CARLOS A. GIMENEZ
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security